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Turner warns of Iran's leftists

By Norman Kempster
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WASHINGTON — CIA Director Stansfield Turner warned yesterday that Iran's Communists — denied real power in the revolution that toppled the shah — could become the only winners if turmoil between the civilian government and Islamic religious leaders continues.

Turner said the oil-rich and strategically located nation was facing increased polarization between religious zealots loyal to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the secular government of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan.

Turner was asked during a breakfast meeting with members of the Los Angeles Times' Washington bureau to predict which side would win a showdown between the Khomeini

and Bazargan forces. He replied, "Neither ... the leftists."

"That's my concern, because the leftists are well-organized and well-armed," he said. "If there is a split between these other two (Khomeini and Bazargan), it leaves an opportunity for the Marxist guerrillas and terrorists to try to step in and take control."

Turner said the Soviet Union has played a low-key role in Iran. "They are playing a two-track policy," Turner said. "They are quietly supporting the (Bazargan) government on one hand and undermining it with propaganda broadcasts and support for the Tudeh (Communist) Party on the other."

"They are still ambivalent because they haven't quite seen where it is going to go," he said.

Turner and his intelligence agents have been criticized for failing to foresee the fall of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi and his pro-American government.

Turner said he resents talk of an intelligence "failure" in Iran. Nevertheless, he conceded that less than a month before the Nov. 4 riots which brought down the shah's civilian government and sealed the monarch's fate, the CIA believed the regime would survive.

Turner said the Soviet KGB apparently made many of the same miscalculations.

"I think they (the Soviets) were in exactly the same position we were before November," he said. "I think they assumed, particularly because they are a police state, that the police elements of Iran would be used to keep the thing from getting out of control."